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**Central Florida Arts Leadership Pulls Together To Create
GOPAR
Greater Orlando Performing Arts Relief**

Orlando, FL - What started as an intended-to-be one-time online telethon of sorts hosted by Orlando area theatrical mainstays Kenny Howard, Rich Charron and Michael Wanzie has, with the combined efforts of many of the area's most prominent theater professionals championed by Orlando Shakes' artistic director Jim Helsinger, morphed into what is now intended to be a significant permanent charitable organization created specifically to address the needs of individuals in crisis who work in the field of the performing arts.

Acting as individuals, independent of the performance venues, colleges, and theatrical troupes with which they are associated, this group of artistic leaders has been meeting regularly via Zoom since early spring, at the behest of Helsinger, to discuss the state and fate of theater in the face of the Covid-19 related global pandemic. Almost simultaneously Howard, Charron and Wanzie had begun hosting their Social Distance Showcase fundraising effort which they hastily launched to gift \$100 cash infusions to area artists in need due to loss of income related to the pandemic and the resulting closures of theaters, theme parks, night clubs, and dinner attractions.

“In our area, more so than most” explained Wanzie, “Those who work in the performing arts are particularly vulnerable to finding themselves in a state of personal crisis because of our highly prevalent gig-culture and the fact that our theaters do not employ year-round stock actors.” Kenny Howard also observes, “Many artists who work at theme parks and other attractions are not full-time employees and as such do not enjoy the security and benefits often associated with full time employment.”

While the Social Distance Showcase series managed to raise in excess of \$19,000 and assisted 187 area artists who had applied for assistance, the non-registered entity behind this effort lacked a credible standing as a charitable organization and as such donations to the effort were therefore not tax deductible. Howard and Wanzie raised this concern when meeting with their colleagues during the weekly arts leadership Zoom meeting and recognizing the significant need among their peers the entire group addressed the issue by pledging to form a more structured and permanent alternative to the Social Distance Showcase concept. As a result of this commitment, and with 100 percent consensus of those involved, it was decided that the most viable and expedient solution to the challenges related to the creation of this new entity was to partner with St. Luke's United Methodist Church and

its already well established support of those who work in the field of the performing arts with an array of already-available resources to create what has now been named GOPAR - **Greater Orlando Performing Arts Relief.**

MOVING FORWARD

The long-term goal for GOPAR is to one day become its own registered 501 (c) 3 charitable organization with a board of directors independent from that of the church but still associated with all that St. Luke's has to offer. St. Luke's has a laudable history of launching charitable organizations which now operate independently as stand-alone entities with their own boards. The marvelous Shepherd's Hope, which offers medical assistance to the uninsured in need, is but one such fine example of precisely that.

INTRODUCING GOPAR

Who: created by Local Arts Leaders for professionals in the performing arts.

What: Relief Network to provide emergency services, counseling, resource referrals and financial assistance, loosely modeled on New York's Actor's Fund but with a decidedly more whole-person / whole needs approach.

Where: Entered into partnership with St. Luke's UMC of Orlando - which prides itself in offering services regardless of religious affiliation, or lack thereof, to provide organizational and fund administration assistance.

When: Presently underway with a Labor Day Weekend online fundraiser in planning and assistance applications to be invited in September.

Why 1: The unprecedented interruption of thousands of arts performances and events in Central Florida since March has left tens of thousands furloughed or unemployed.

Why 2: Many have not worked since late February or March, and reopening is still likely months away for large venues. The Broadway Series, Opera Orlando (etc.) have already announced cancellation of fall dates.

Why 3: Despite being one of the largest professional arts & entertainment communities in the country, the region has no single connection or support point for the thousands of professionals (both on stage and behind the scenes) who are largely self employed or work part-time for numerous employers. While many organizations exist which fund the arts, none are currently programmed to assist individual artists.

“Central Florida is so blessed with a tremendous talent pool but at the moment so many of those artists are unemployed due to the coronavirus and are in jeopardy of losing any state or federal assistance they may have had. Our community needs to take steps to ensure we can

keep talented artists who are in temporary distress in our area for the future enjoyment of all.” Jim Helsinger

Share mechanisms/services

Through this association with the church those who turn to GOPAR for assistance will- after filling out a very brief online application - have the opportunity to speak on the phone with a St. Lukes staff member or volunteer who has undergone training with regards to listening and also assessing need and providing appropriate assistance, referrals, and resources with an approach that is more holistic in nature than simply disbursing a one-time sum of money and with an aim toward achieving long-term financial stability and emotional well being.

Other details:

Website: GOPAR.ORG

GOPAR LOGO DESIGN by Joseph Rinaldi